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## IS THE BOOK OF JONAH HISTORICAL?

### III.

Internal evidence in favor of the historical character of the Book.

BY THE EDITOR.

The historical character of the Book of Jonah is not to be rejected, (1) because it contains but few of those historical particulars which are commonly regarded as necessary for authentication; or (2) because of a supposed superabundance of the miraculous element in the Book; or (3) because of the apparent improbability, as we may regard the event, of Nineveh's repentance; or (4) because Jonah's conduct as exhibited in the Book seems incredible. These objections disappear, when we consider the narrative in the light of revelation and of history.

To those who would find records dating from 500-800 B. C. with all the characteristics of modern history, who reject entirely every vestige of the supernatural, who would limit the power of God, or who would expect the life of every man to be a perfect life,—to such the Book of Jonah may not appear to be historical. With such persons, argument is useless. But granting that the book *may*, for aught that it contains, be historical, is there anything *in* it to prove this? In this paper let us consider briefly, the internal evidence which may be gathered in favor of the historical truth of these events.

Critics, and by these we mean *all* who have studied the book critically, and not merely those who have adopted rationalistic views as to its character, may be divided into three classes: (1) Those who accept the historical truth of the narrative, and regard Jonah as the author; (2) those who accept the historical truth of the narrative, but deny that Jonah was the author; (3) those who deny its historical character, and deny that Jonah was the author. Evidently, if once it could be shown that Jonah was the author, the historical truth of the narrative would follow closely. For it would be absurd to suppose

that an inspired prophet would utter such things concerning himself, unless they were true, even if a great doctrinal truth were to be taught thereby. The question of authorship, however, will demand a separate paper for its discussion, and for the present with two of the three classes of critics we shall agree that the book was written at least two or three hundred years after the events narrated took place. This position, assumed for the sake of argument, must carefully be borne in mind throughout the discussion.

### I. THE TIMES OF JONAH.

Do the events narrated in this Book harmonize with (1) the general condition of Israel; (2) the condition of affairs in Assyria; and (3) the attitude which may be supposed to have existed between Israel and Assyria at the time these events are said to have occurred? If it can be shown that the events here recorded are entirely consistent with what we know in these particulars, and that they are a natural consequence of conditions existing at that time, there exists, at least, a probability that they are true.

1. *The Condition of Israel.*—Jeroboam II. (B. C. 825–784), the fourth of Jehu's dynasty, was king. The coming of a deliverer had been foretold in the reign of Jehoahaz (2 Kings XIII., 4; XIV., 26, 27). This deliverer, who was to rescue Israel from the yoke of Syria, and restore the kingdom to its pristine Solomonic glory (2 Kings XIV., 25) was Jeroboam II. Encouraged by the words of Jonah, the son of Amittai, of Gath-hepher, and acting doubtless with his advice, Jeroboam undertook "those brilliant and energetic expeditions which restored the kingdom of Ephraim in its whole extent from Syria eastward, and down to the Dead Sea, and raised the monarchy to a power and prosperity such as it had not enjoyed from its beginning, and afterward never enjoyed again."\* With Damascus captured, Moab and Ammon again subdued, there came a period of highest prosperity. But that this restoration was only political and not religious, is evident from the testimony of the prophets Amos and Hosea, who were Jonah's contemporaries. There are no words to describe the depths of corruption and degradation into which the nation sank. Idolatry was universal and of every kind. Oppression, extravagance and licentiousness reigned everywhere. Unparalleled prosperity led to unparalleled luxury and degeneracy. In the midst of this, the prophet Amos declares that Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel be led away captive out of their land (VII., 9–17). For his boldness he is compelled to flee from Bethel, the King's headquarters at this time. Nor were the denuncia-

\*Kalisch, *Bible Studies*, II., p. 115.

tions of Israel's crimes less terrible as uttered by Hosea. The period was, in a word, one of the highest prosperity and at the same time of the deepest moral corruption.

2. *The Condition of Assyria*.—An idea of the condition of Assyria may be gained from a knowledge of the events which transpired before and after this particular period. The Assyrian empire had for centuries been growing in strength. Of the five centuries, during which, according to Herodotus, this empire held sway, four had passed. Wars without number had been waged west of the Euphrates. Their devastating campaigns had extended even to the islands of the Mediterranean. Lands had been pillaged and nations carried into captivity. In B. C. 854, according to Sayce's chronology, or sixty years earlier according to the accepted chronology, Shalmaneser had defeated a confederation, headed by Benhadad of Damascus, including Ahab of Israel; and later in his reign he destroyed the forces of Hazael, Benhadad's successor, and extorted tribute from various princes, among others, Jehu. Fourteen years after Jeroboam's death, Menahem, king of Israel, paid tribute to Assyria. A few years later, Hoshea, the vassal of Assyria, was placed on Israel's throne. A few years later, Sargon carried the ten tribes into captivity.

3. *Assyria and Israel*.—Israel had almost passed the bounds of the divine forbearance. Never before had the nation, seemingly, reached such degradation. Humanly speaking, everything had been done to bring the people to a consciousness of their perilous situation. Prophets had pleaded in kind tones; they had denounced with inspired severity. Already it had been foretold that destruction was impending. Yet with every such announcement there went the promise that repentance and a turning to Jehovah would avert the terrible sentence. Their entire past history was an illustration of this principle. But Israel was so sunken, so corrupt, that the prophets who would warn and plead were compelled to flee. Was the divine power exhausted? Was it not necessary that at such a time extraordinary measures be adopted? Once more, in a manner never before tried, Jehovah will show this hardened nation that he is a loving and compassionate God, that whatever judgments may have been announced he will repent, if those who are at fault will but return to him. One more chance is given them. A second and no less important truth is also to be taught them: Israel is not the only object of the divine love. Israel truly is the chosen people, but if she continue in her wickedness, she shall be rejected, and in her place another shall be substituted.

A prophet is sent to a foreign city, not chiefly for that city's sake.

but for the sake of Israel. *Fear and repentance bring salvation*—this is the theme of our Book, the key to a correct understanding of the events narrated in it. Let us, at this point, keep in mind the canon, that the miraculous events of Scripture were intended primarily for the times in which these events took place. Believing, then, that for the Israel of Jonah's time the wonderful events narrated in this Book were intended, and that they were intended to serve as still one more indication of divine love and mercy, a warning which, if heeded, might even have prevented the ejection of the nation, we see in the choice of Nineveh, as the city in connection with which the lesson should be taught, and in the choice of this particular time, *evidence* which, while in itself it does not prove, may at least be allowed to favor the historical truth of these events. Pious Israelites knew well that corruption meant destruction, that the idolatry and wickedness of their age, unless there was repentance, must be followed by punishment and even annihilation. Past history taught them that God used foreign nations as the instruments of judgment. Men like Jonah, aside from inspiration, could not fail to recognize in Assyria the "rod divinely appointed for execution of judgment." The attention of all was directed toward this empire. It had been rising gradually. It had been mercilessly crushing every nationality with which it came into contact. It was, without a doubt, the terror of every Israelite, even in the midst of this temporary period of prosperity. The capital of this empire, known so well, and so soon to come into deadly encounter with Israel, was chosen by Jehovah to serve as an example of his clemency. A time was taken, which, as we regard it, was the only time that would have been in any respect appropriate. And can we doubt the wisdom of the divine choice, when we consider how powerful must have been the influence of these events, when they became known, upon the people of Israel? The announcement that by Jonah, their own prophet, Nineveh, her king, nobles, and people, had been brought to repentance, and the promulgation of the miraculous events connected with this missionary journey—how must the hearts of Israel have been stirred. Yet where are the records of such an influence, it will be asked. What was said in a former article,\* touching the absence of any record of the Ninevites' repentance, may be said here: "While reference to it would gladly have been welcomed, and allusions to it in the later prophets might naturally have been expected, the absence of both may be explained." And yet we are not prepared to grant that no record of it has been preserved. As such a record we regard the Book of Jonah.

\* O. T. Student for November, 1883, pp. 71, 72.

It is nothing more or less than a testimony, that during long centuries this wonderful event was handed down from mouth to mouth, and this being true the influence it exerted cannot be over-estimated. Did it produce the desired result? In the case of the nation, no; nor did many of the expedients tried by God succeed, at least to outward observation; but who will dare to say that, influenced by this unique and historical object-lesson, many individuals did not see the evil of their ways and turn to Jehovah?

## II. GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL ALLUSIONS.

There are found in the Book many allusions of a geographical and historical nature, which go far to prove the reality of the events with which these allusions are connected. Some of them deserve at least a brief mention.

1. *Nineveh's Size*.—We read in III., 3: "Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey." Whatever interpretation be taken of the last clause, "of three days' journey," the great size of the city was so well known, and bore so important a part in the narrative, that the writer feels called upon to make special mention of the fact. Its great size is attested by later writers and by contemporaneous monuments. In the time of Jonah, as well as in that of Nahum and Zephaniah, Nineveh was viewed not as a separate city, but as a district, the capital of the Assyrian empire. Under this title were included Kouyunjik, Nimroud, and at a later time Khorsabad. The district thus designated was of sufficient size to accommodate six or seven hundred thousand people, the number implied in the calculation made in the last verses of chapter IV.

2. *Nineveh's Wickedness*.—We read in I., 2: "Preach against Nineveh, for her wickedness is come up before me." The historical truth of this allusion is not difficult to show. "Their own records furnish proofs in abundance; the very boasts in which they gloried were, in the eyes of the pious Hebrews, their strongest condemnation—their bloody triumphs and relentless massacres, their unsparing devastations, and insatiable pillage. They were, therefore, called by contemporary prophets destroyers and ravagers, lions murdering for their whelps, and filling their dens with ill-gotten prey, plunderers piling up endless treasures of silver and gold and costly store, overweening criminals who, impiously exceeding their divine commission in dispensing retribution, devour the wealth of innocent nations, and rise up in rebellion against God himself as his enemies and haters; while Nineveh was described as the town of blood replete with fraud and violence,

and spreading misery over the whole earth, as the shameless seducer ruining nations by her witcheries, and as the abode of giddy conceit, unblushingly protesting, 'I and none beside me.'"\*

3. *The Mourning of Cattle*.—We read in III., 8: "But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth and cry mightily unto God." This mourning of cattle is shown to have been an Asiatic custom (Herodotus IX., 24), the same signs being made both for penitential mourning and mourning for the dead. The cattle here referred to were the domestic animals, such as oxen, sheep and goats,—those between which and man there is always a close connection. Further consideration of this remarkable passage belongs to the commentary.

4. *The Ninevites' Violence*.—We read in III., 8: "Yea, let them every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in their hands." This, as is seen from the passage above, was Nineveh's besetting sin, developed during centuries of unresisted and insolent aggression in her wars of conquest.

Now, do not these particulars, known to be true, go to prove the truth of the book in which they are stated? Or shall we say, with a distinguished scholar: "All that they show is the conformity of various points with the known facts of history. It is quite possible, for aught that belongs to the geographical or historical notices in question, that the story of Jonah going to Nineveh and traveling through it for three days, partakes largely of the fabulous. The legendary and parabolical may be conformed to veri-similitude. A careful writer will assuredly refrain from violating the probable or running counter to facts, manners, and customs, as far as they come in his way. To make a story agree with history and geography whenever it touches on their respective regions is one thing; to convert it into true history is another."† No stronger presentation of the other side of this argument could be made; but is it convincing? (1) It is granted that they show a conformity of various points with the known facts of history; now (2) if it were beyond question that the Book is legendary and parabolical, it can be understood how, in spite of this legendary character, it should contain certain minute allusions such as those referred to; but when the historical character of the Book is in dispute, when, as may fairly be claimed, there is at least as much to be said, aside from this argument, in favor of the historical reality, as against it, we claim that the presence of geographical and historical allusions, so distinct, so definite and so important as these, *favors*, we do not use the word *proves*, the historical side. And (3) granting with Dr. Davidson that

\* Kalisch. † Davidson, O. T. Introduction, III., 269.

"a careful writer will assuredly refrain from violating the probable or running counter to facts, manners, and customs, as far as they come in his way," it would nevertheless be difficult to affirm that the author of the Book of Jonah was a careful writer, if, with Dr. Davidson, we, at the same time grant (*a*) that the character of Jonah is a mystery, (*b*) that the long and toilsome journey to Nineveh has much improbability connected with it, (*c*) that the result attributed to the preaching of an Israelite stranger presents something of the incredible, (*d*) that the omission of the name of the Assyrian king is singular, (*e*) that the prophet's being in the fish's belly so long without harm is a peculiar prodigy. Some writers of fiction may be careful writers, but this surely cannot be predicated of one who deals so largely in the singular, the mysterious, the improbable, the incredible, as, according to such critics, our author is supposed to do. (4) If, as has been granted, the Book in its present form is the work of an author living long after the events had transpired, at a time when Nineveh had ceased to be, when the relations existing between nations had entirely changed, when Israel herself was no longer a nation, but a scattered people, we may, with confidence, recognize in these apparently incidental, but really fundamental references,—at the same time characteristic of the narrative, and essential to its correct understanding, evidence of great value in determining the question of historical reality.

### III. JONAH'S MISSION.

The foreign mission which really constitutes the subject of the Book, when correctly interpreted and duly appreciated, is evidence of the reality of the events with which it is connected. This has been, in part, anticipated. Let us, however, consider this mission briefly from two standpoints:—

1. *The Divine point of view.*—As has been stated, Jonah's mission to Nineveh was intended chiefly for the sake of Israel. In the low and hardened condition of the Israelites the divine wisdom adopted a plan, not entirely new, yet possessing elements of a peculiar character. These wonderful events are designed to show that although Israel has disobeyed every divine command, and deserves utter destruction for this disobedience; and although this destruction has, indeed, already been announced, nevertheless, if she will but repent, *she may yet be saved*. They also imply that the power of Jehovah, Israel's God, is felt among other nations, and that Israel, although the most cherished object of the divine love is not the only object. Israel's own prophet, Jonah, held in scorn by Israel herself, is sent to a city, the most haughty, the most worldly, the most wicked of all cities; a city of



which Israel stood in greatest terror. At the warning of this stranger, one of a nation held by them in contempt, they listen, tremble; and, in sack-cloth and ashes, with loud wailing on the part of man and beast, from king to beggar, they *repent*. But this is not all. This wickedness had ascended to heaven before Jehovah; the edict had gone forth that within a definite time the city should be destroyed. A failure to fulfill this judgment would disgrace the prophet, and seemingly dishonor God. Yet because it had repented the city was *saved*, even in spite of the prayers and sorrow of the prophet through whom the sentence had been pronounced. The end is not yet reached. To make the lesson still more clear and impressive, the divine teacher and father deigns to show the basis on which rests this great principle, that repentance brings salvation. Most beautifully he teaches that this basis is the *love* and *compassion* which is felt by him for humanity. As we believe, the teaching of prophets, whether by word or by action, was intended by God primarily for the age in which these prophets lived. Of the secondary fulfilment of prophecy, of a secondary use of prophetic teaching, this is not the place to speak. May we not, therefore, see a close connection, a peculiar relation between the purpose of this mission and the period in which it was executed? It was a warning which Israel could not fail to understand, whether she heeded it or not. That the interests of Nineveh were also considered cannot be doubted, but they were secondary.

2. *The human point of view.*—The divine call is not always expressed in words. Abram was called by God to leave Ur of the Chaldees. There were, however, considerations from the human standpoint which accompanied and, in part, constituted the call. This was true also of Jonah. The word of the Lord came to him. But in what way? The question as to the degree of intimacy existing at different periods between the Israelites and their neighbors, both those near at hand, and those who were more remote, has as yet received no satisfactory treatment. That of *Kalisch*, while in many respects admirable, has peculiar defects. We do not refer to the question of the *law* on this subject, but rather to the question of the facts in the case. When we recall the story of Ruth the Moabitess; when we study the life of David and note, that once when in trouble, he left his parents in the care of Moab, that he received kindness at the hands of the king of Ammon, that, while hiding in the cave of Adullam, he collected about him men of all kinds and of various nations, that he dwelt some time with the Philistines in Gath, that to him foreigners remained attached when his own kin had deserted him, that he was in most intimate friendship with Hiram king of Tyre; when we follow the

history of Solomon, as well as that of many later kings; when we remember that one Israelitish priest was called to anoint a Syrian king (1 Kings XIX., 15), that a second was on terms of closest relation to the Syrian royalty (2 Kings VIII., 7-13), that a third "inveighed against Damascus and Phœnicia, the Philistines, and Edomites, Moab and Ammon, on account of their cruelties and iniquities with the same fervor and almost the same impressive terms of reproof, with which he denounced the trespasses of Judah and Israel (Amos I., II.)"—when these and many other cases are considered, is there anything in the relation of Israel to the outside world which does not favor a mission by a devoted prophet to such a nation as Assyria?

Jonah's was a bold, impulsive nature. He was a man of broad heart, of large aims. Inspired from above, impelled from within, he would undertake the task of improving morally this worldly, wicked city of Nineveh, to which all eyes were turned, and upon which all nations were dependent. The belief that all nations were at some time to serve one God, was not confined to the prophets of a later age. Was this not a natural thing to do? Was it, in any sense, strange that so glorious a thought should present itself to this enthusiastic soul? That it was possible, appears from the issue. That Jonah was the man to send, is clear from the fact that the work contemplated was in the end accomplished. God always chooses the right man. But it is asked: Is this not contradicted by his effort to escape from the presence of Jehovah when called to do the work, and by the anger and chagrin displayed when the mission proved successful? No. These facts but evidence more clearly the truth of the narrative, and this interpretation of it, as will be shown later. As it appears to the writer, (1) such a mission would not have been undertaken by a man living 400-600 B. C., because at that time the attitude of the Jews toward foreigners had undergone a radical change. At this period that freedom of intercourse, that friendly intimacy, that general interest was a thing of the past. (2) Such a mission in all its scope could not even have been conceived by a writer living at that age. Consequently (3) it took place in the age to which it is attributed, an age in every respect suitable; and having taken fast hold of the people for whose instruction it was primarily intended, it was handed down from generation to generation; and, being an historical fact, a writer of this later age, while he could not have conceived such a mission, can and does formulate it in writing. The fact of such a mission is, therefore, not only perfectly credible, but strictly consistent with the spirit and custom of this early age. Taking this fact in connection with a second, which we have conceded, and which we think can be proven, viz., that the Book in its

present form is the work of a writer living long after the events themselves had transpired, there seems to be clear evidence of the historical truth of the Book.

There still remain five lines of evidence which deserve attention : (1) Jonah's refusal to obey the divine call ; (2) his chagrin at the success of his own mission ; (3) the relation of the Hymn of Thanksgiving (chap. III.) to the Book ; (4) the general lack of unification characteristic of the Book, and its abrupt close ; (5) the standpoint of the writer of the Book. These will be taken up in a *fourth* paper.

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## DID EZRA WRITE OR AMEND ANY PORTION OF THE PENTATEUCH ?

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It has become so common with a recent school of critics to attribute the authorship of an important portion of the Pentateuch to Ezra, and the opinion is affirmed with such emphasis and assurance, that a demand is made upon scholars to inquire whether these things are so. There is but one source of evidence on this subject to which an appeal can be made, and by whose evidence all inquirers must abide. This source is the accounts which we have in writings contemporaneous with him of what Ezra did as priest and ruler in Jerusalem, after the return from the captivity. I say "contemporaneous" with him, for traditions which were not written till five centuries afterward are utterly worthless in deciding such a question as this.

Is there, then, any *authentic historical evidence* that Ezra composed a single new law, or remodelled an old one ? This question answered, the relation of Ezra to the so-called law of Moses, or the Pentateuch as we have it to-day, is settled. Settled, I say, unless men will forsake historic proof for baseless guesses and vague tradition. The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah contain all the history that is at all reliable of the time, the character, and the work of Ezra. The extant Jewish literature between the time of Ezra and the Christian era, more than four centuries, says not a word of Ezra, or of his having anything to do with the law as editor of the old document, much less of his being the author of any part of it. The worthies and authors of note of the Hebrews are mentioned by the author of Ecclesiasticus, or the Wisdom of Jesus, the Son of Sirach, a work written about two centuries after the time of Ezra ; but Ezra's name is not mentioned, though Zerubbabel's and